

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)**

Counties: INYO

Applicant: INYO/MONO AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT

Project Title: LOWER OWENS RIVER WATERSHED AND HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Reference Number: SNC 070195

PROJECT SCOPE

The project will enable the Inyo/Mono Agriculture Department to remove selected high risk invasive weed sites and extend its efforts beyond current removal rates during the critical Lower Owens River rewatering period on 19,206 acres in the Owens River watershed. The proposed project area is a popular recreation area for fishing, hunting, hiking, bicycling, off highway vehicle use, bird watching, and other activities. It includes lands that are utilized for cattle grazing, municipal water gathering, and that contain Native American historical sites. Certain areas are habitat for threatened and endangered plant and animal species. This site improvement project is a strong collaboration between Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and Inyo County to restore and protect this watershed. This project currently has matching funds and in-kind services in the amount of \$262,504.

The long-term benefits of this project include:

- improving water quality through lessened erosion and silt deposition;
- Improving working landscape sustainability, as ranching and agricultural uses will be protected from noxious weed invasion
- Increasing recreational and educational opportunities due to better accessibility and lessened wildfire frequency and intensity
- Increasing biodiversity to benefit native plants and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species
- Improving air quality due to lessened dust conditions
- Improving stream bank stability

This project will be accomplished by:

- Hiring two seasonal employees
- Purchasing and renting equipment, pick-up truck, ATV and herbicides, to treat Perennial Pepperweed, Canada Thistle and Russian Knappweed
- eradicating invasive species
- surveying surrounding land to identify invasive weeds and map these sites
- Disseminating educational brochures
- Monitoring work by establishing photo points and photographing conditions before and after treatments.
- Monitoring project by assessing the number of acres in second year that are significantly free of invasive species due to treatment during the first year of the project
- Completing 6 month progress reports to SNC

The SNC funding allows this time-sensitive, expanded effort to proceed in co-ordination with the ongoing collaborative process of the Inyo/Mono Agriculture Department and LADWP.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Purchase equipment and hire seasonal employees	May 2008
Establish photo points and photograph pre-treatment conditions	May 2008
Disseminate educational brochures	May 2008
Initiate herbicide treatments on three invasive species	May 2008 – September 2008
Conduct surveillance of surrounding areas for new infestation sites and map these sites	May 2008 – September 2008
Complete and submit 6 month progress report to SNC	October 2008
Continue herbicide treatments on three invasive species	November 2008 – April 2009
Conduct surveillance of surrounding areas for new infestation sites and map these sites	November 2008 – April 2009
Complete and submit twelve-month progress report to SNC	April 2009
Complete herbicide treatments	April 2009 – August 2009
Conduct surveillance of surrounding areas for new infestation sites and map these sites	April 2009 – August 2009
Assess number of acres in second year that are significantly free of invasive species due to treatment during first year of project	September 2009 - October 2009
Photograph post-treatment conditions using established photo points	October 2009
Final Report/Final Payment Request	December 2009

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Seasonal field assistants salaries (two seasons)	\$37,274
Herbicides	9,053
Equipment rental	46,866
Equipment purchase	43,000
Administrative costs	20,429
GRAND TOTAL	\$156,622

Letters of Support:

- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Owens Valley Committee
- Sierra Club
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Recommendation:

Staff recommends authorization of this grant for the requested \$156,622.

Project Name: Lower Owens River Watershed and Habitat Improvement Project

Project Summary

The Lower Owens River Project (LORP) is a massive river restoration project in Inyo County, California. This project was initiated by the Inyo County/Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Long Term Water Agreement of 1991. The LORP was completed this year and water now flows in the lower reaches of the Owens River, which has been dry since the City of Los Angeles diverted water into their aqueduct in 1917 for municipal use.

The watershed along the lower Owens River has been negatively impacted from decades of being dry. Native plant species have declined in many areas and are absent in others. These conditions encourage non-native weed species invasion and expansion. There are currently only 1,119 gross acres of weed invaded lands within the LORP project boundaries, but 18,087 gross acres of invasive weeds threaten the LORP area upstream. With the recent water release into the lower Owens River, it is critical that the current infestations that threaten the rehabilitation of this ecosystem be eradicated or contained. If weed infestations are allowed to take hold before native plant communities can reestablish, control in the future may not be economically possible.

This project will enable the Inyo/Mono Agriculture Department to aggressively attack selected "high value" weed sites. These sites were selected based on plant species, size of infestation, age of infestation, and most importantly the potential for spread into the LORP area. This funding would support two seasonal employees, operating expenses, and public educational material, specific to the exotic plant threats to the success of the rehabilitation of native plant communities within the LORP. Weed species that will be targeted include Perennial pepperweed, Canada thistle, and Russian knapweed. Funds will also be used to survey for weed infestations along approximately eight miles of the Owens River that have not been previously surveyed.

The proposed project area is a popular recreation area for fishing, hunting, hiking, bicycling, OHV use, bird watching, and other activities. It includes lands that are utilized for cattle range and municipal water gathering, and contain Native American historical sites as well as habitat for wildlife. Certain areas within the proposed project area are habitat from threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

The total Lower Owens River Watershed and Habitat Improvement Project cost will be \$419,126.56, with \$262,504.40 contributed directly to the project in-kind by the City of Los Angeles and the Inyo/Mono Agriculture Department. Total grant being requested is \$156,622.16.